

February 14, 2017

The Honorable Dan Hawkins and Committee Members
House Health and Human Services Committee

RE: HB 2139 – Licensure of Dental Therapists – John Bellome, AARP Kansas

Good afternoon Chairman Hawkins and members of the House Health and Human Services Committee. Before explaining my support of HB 2139, let me introduce myself. I am an Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon who has been intimately involved in various dental careers in both military and civilian practice. Prior to retirement, I served as a Colonel in the United States Army Dental Corps and was deployed during Operation Desert Storm. In addition, I worked for the Kansas City Veterans Administration Medical Center for 32 years as Director of Oral Surgery, following private practice, before serving as Director of Undergraduate Oral Surgery at University of Missouri Kansas City Dental School. I recently retired from that position. I am also writing on behalf of AARP Kansas. AARP Kansas represents more than 320,000 members across Kansas. Please accept our written testimony in support of HB 2139.

I have seen the negative effects of poor or no dental care throughout my professional career. We desperately need to provide care to the following:

- Families with income below 200% of the poverty level;
- Those individuals with mental and physical disabilities; and
- Kansans who live in isolated areas which are dentally underserved.

We must increase the number of dental professionals serving Kansans. In 53 of 105 counties in Kansas, there are two or fewer dentists in practice, and thirteen counties have no dentists at all serving their populations.

(Over)

If Kansas does not allow the use of services of midlevel practitioners (expanded practice hygienists), the underserved population will suffer needlessly and hospital visits or admissions will increase due to complications from poor dental care – visits or admissions that could have been avoided.

Legislators who craft scope of practice laws must balance the competing interest of quality, cost, and access. Increasingly, states are confronted with dire access-to-care problems in areas with inadequate provider supply. By 2030, the number of older adults in the United States is likely to double, reaching 72 million, or nearly one out of every five people. There are simply not enough dentists at present to care for this aging population, and the patient load of dentists currently in practice will dramatically increase as more people require dental care for more years.

I therefore implore you to support passage of this bill to better protect the dental and overall health of all the citizens of Kansas.

Respectfully,
John Bellome